



Chambers's Journal

SIXTH SERIES.

THE FATE OF SIR WALTER SCOTT'S MANUSCRIPTS.

PART I.

LORD TENNYSON once said, 'I would have given anything to have seen Sir Walter Scott.' To him 'he was the most chivalrous literary figure of this century, and the author with the widest range since Shakespeare.'

Many of us who might also like to have seen him must rest content with his works, or a sight of his manuscript. It is not easy to measure the prodigious literary activity of Sir Walter Scott, for he flung off letters, poems, essays, review articles, and his matchless novels with marvellous ease and felicity, and his flowing, lawyer-trained handwriting betrays wonderfully few corrections and interlineations. Of his manuscripts, of which over fifty were on view at the Scott Centenary Exhibition in Edinburgh in 1871, whole pages of the novels might be seen without one change. In the case of Scott, writing was begun at first as a labour of love; by-and-by it became a necessity of his nature, then an additional necessity when he was plunged into his own and the financial difficulties of others; and there is no braver story in literature than that of the heroic efforts he made to remove a mountain of debt, with failing powers and a tired and worn-out brain. 'After all,' he said to his friend Morritt in the heyday of his reputation, 'scribbling is an odd propensity. I don't believe there is any ointment, even that of the *Edinburgh Review*, which can cure the infected.' An edition of his entire works issued in 1871 occupied a hundred volumes. That meant much toil and the covering of an immense amount of manuscript either by his own hand or through dictation by the hand of an amanuensis. The manuscripts are in manageable bulk, but the weight of the stereotype plates from which one edition of his works was printed was twenty-eight tons.

One gazes with wonder at any one of the manuscript volumes left by Scott, which the printing-press has multiplied beyond all hope of reckoning. For instance, three million volumes alone of one of the cheaper issues were sold between 1851 and 1890.

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This was through Messrs A. & C. Black. Robert Cadell, who held the copyrights for the twenty years previously, sold at least two million volumes. Of the people's editions of the writings, in weekly sheets, over eight millions of sheets were printed during the same period. Constable, their first publisher, had also done well with the dearer form. Now various publishing houses have vied with each other in reprinting them. Who can estimate the widespread pleasure and profit from the perusal of these writings? Scott in this respect has been, and is still, a great benefactor, not to speak of the army of papermakers, printers, and book-binders to whom he has given employment.

There is no evidence that Sir Walter himself set any value on his manuscripts; at least, he never showed the slightest desire to retain them in his own possession. Although, like Mr Gladstone's post-cards, Scott manuscript is plentiful, yet when it changes hands it steadily rises in value. For instance, *Old Mortality*, which Tennyson thought his greatest novel, and for which Cadell paid £33, was sold at Sotheby's in June 1897 for £600; while the *Lady of the Lake*, which brought 264 guineas at Cadell's sale, again changed hands at the same time for £1290. This manuscript is all in the author's own hand, and exactly in the condition in which it was sent to the printer. *Old Mortality* had been bought by F. Richardson from Mrs W. J. Paton, a daughter of R. Cadell. *Rob Roy*, presented to Lockhart by Cadell, was sold about three years ago to Mr William Law for £600. It seems a misfortune that Scott's manuscripts have been scattered to the four winds of heaven. A room in the Scott Monument, Edinburgh, or at Abbotsford, would have been a suitable abiding-place for them.

When the authorship of the novels was being jealously kept, the usual proceeding on Scott's part was to hand over his tales as written to James Ballantyne, who had them copied for press. The popularity of *Marmion* led Constable to ask Ballantyne to preserve all future manuscripts. Although Scott used an amanuensis freely, yet much of his

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best writing was done by his own hand, in the early morning, in his 'den' at 39 Castle Street, at Ashestiel, or his study at Abbotsford. In addition to authorship he had always a heavy letter-bag—a considerable tax on his good-nature, purse, and patience.

After seeing the small parlour, some twelve feet deep by eleven wide, with its single window, on the north side of the ground-floor at Ashestiel, the home of Scott when he wrote, it was presumed, the greater part of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, *Lady of the Lake*, and began *Waverley*, John Ruskin concluded that a small chamber, 'with a fair world outside: such are the conditions, as far as I know or can gather, of all greatest and best mental work.' We fancy everything depends upon the kind of man you have got within the small chamber.

Miss Russell of Ashestiel afterwards corrected this statement of Ruskin's. It appears that the small study here described was a storeroom in Scott's time, and that the quaint, old-fashioned room on the east side of the entrance-porch, with one window, was his writing-room, while he kept his books upstairs in his dressing-room. When occupied by Scott it had two additional windows, one on each side of the fireplace, from which the Tweed was visible. His greyhounds, Douglas and Percy, were always going in and out of these windows while he was busy with *Marmion*. For this, and all the Scott localities, the reader is recommended to consult that beautiful volume, the *Haunts and Homes of Scott*, by Mr G. G. Napier, or Mrs Maxwell-Scott's *Abbotsford*.

But much more was written by Scott in his 'den' at 39 Castle Street, a square, small room behind his dining-room. It had a single Venetian window, opening on a very small patch of turf; and according to Lockhart, the aspect of the place was rather 'sombrous.' The walls were clad with books, systematically arranged; the volumes for immediate reference lay on a small movable frame. The massive writing-table was constructed after the pattern of one at Rokeby, with a desk on either side, at one of which he worked, his amanuensis being opposite. It had small tiers of drawers reaching all round to the floor. Session papers lay on the top; and on the desk, besides the manuscript at which he might be writing, lay parcels of letters and proof-sheets, neatly done up in red tape. His writing apparatus was an old box, richly carved, lined with crimson velvet, with ink-bottle and taper-stand in silver, all in perfect order, as Dickens liked his table and room to be. Lockhart recalls, when at a gathering of young men in George Street in a room overlooking Scott's study, how the sight of 'that confounded hand,' as Scott filled page after page, kept the host from enjoying himself. 'I have been watching it,' he said; 'it fascinates my eye—it never stops; page after page is finished and thrown on that heap of MS., and still it goes on unmoved, and so it will be until candles are brought in, and God knows how long after that.'

His study at Abbotsford with its private entrance will be familiar to most people. His usual habits were to rise at 5 A.M., light his own fire when it was required, and shave and dress with care and precision. Arrayed in a shooting-jacket, or whatever garment he meant to use for the day, he would be at his desk by 6 A.M., with all his papers arranged before him in accurate order, and his books of reference ready on the floor. Such were the conditions and surroundings of Scott when much of his best work was done.

Sir Walter, then on terms of the greatest friendliness with Constable, presented him on 10th March 1823 with thirteen volumes of the original manuscripts of all his works then in his possession. Scott's letter ran as follows:

'CASTLE STREET, 10th March 1823.

'DEAR CONSTABLE,—You, who have so richly endowed my little collection, cannot refuse me the pleasure of adding to yours. I beg your acceptance of a parcel of MSS., which I know your partialities will give more value to than they deserve, and only annex the condition that they shall be scrupulously concealed during the author's life, and only made forthcoming when it may be necessary to assert his right to be accounted the writer of these novels.

'I enclose a note to Mr Guthrie Wright, who will deliver to you some of them which were in poor Lord Kinneder's possession; and I will send some from Abbotsford, which will, I think, nearly complete the whole, though there may be some missing leaves.

'I will set about the Romance (for *Encyclopædia Britannica*) immediately, which will relieve my other labours. I hope you are not the worse of our very merry party yesterday.—Yours truly,

WALTER SCOTT.'

The merry party mentioned above was the first Bannatyne Club dinner, at which Scott presided. This club, of which he was the moving spirit, had for its object the printing of Scottish books of history and antiquities. William Erskine, afterwards Lord Kinneder, a bosom-friend of Sir Walter's, was a little man of feeble make, with 'small, elegant features, hectic cheek, and soft hazel eyes, the index of the quick, sensitive spirit within.' He it was who was 'chased out of the world by a calumny, killed by its foul breath.' In a word, a trumped-up story was circulated to his hurt, which broke his health and his heart.

On the envelope of the above letter Constable wrote, 'The most kind and valuable letter I ever received;' and in his reply a fortnight later he said that he would have great pride in 'preserving these invaluable treasures as memorials of your liberality and confidence; indeed, the gift is such as you only could bestow—and, you will forgive me for adding, such as you yourself only would have made. The whole shall be carefully arranged with my own hand, and be forthcoming when required.' Then the shrewdness of the publisher showed itself.

Constable forecasts the day when there would be attempts at illustrating the novels, when notes would be written full of absurdities and blunders. With Scott's consent he would get a set of all the novels, tales, and romances interleaved and neatly done up, which might be placed ready to his hand, when, if so disposed, the author could himself add suitable notes on the characters, scenes, and incidents. This was the earliest suggestion of the annotated edition of Scott's works, of which his creditors and Cadell, his publisher, were to reap the main benefit.

After Constable's failure there arose a delicate question as to the ownership of these Waverley manuscripts; did they really belong to the bankrupt estate? Lord Newton decided that they did, and these were sold by Evans, 93 Pall Mall, on 19th August 1831, for £317. One of the lot in 1897, as we have seen, brought double the amount of the whole thirteen. Constable had begun to collect Scott's manuscripts before the date of the gift already recorded. In 1821 he had noted on the flyleaf of *Rokeby* that he also possessed *Marmion*, *Don Roderick* and *Field of Waterloo*, *Lord of the Isles*, and *Life of Swift*. He added that 'the original MS. of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* was not preserved; such things not having been thought important till the publication of *Marmion*, when I desired Mr Ballantyne to preserve the manuscript for me.' At that time John Ballantyne had the original MS. of the *Lady of the Lake*. We believe there is a copy of the original edition of the *Lay* in the library at Windsor Castle with Scott's MS. annotations.

The following are the prices realised in 1831 for Constable's manuscripts. A note in the catalogue was to the effect that these were all in the handwriting of Sir Walter Scott, and that the annals of literature scarcely afforded a similar instance of facility of composition. 'The public will be astonished to perceive the few erasures, alterations, or additions which occur from the first conceptions of the author to the final transmission to the press.' Although the saleroom was crowded by those curious to see these manuscripts, the public might be justly surprised to remark the small sums they brought. The first six were perfect, or nearly so; the rest were not complete. Some of them were bought on commission:

	Price.	Purchaser.
The Monastery	£18 0 0	Mr Thorpe.
Guy Mannering	27 10 0	Mr Thorpe.
Old Mortality.....	33 0 0	Mr Robertson.
Antiquary.....	42 0 0	Captain Basil Hall.
Rob Roy.....	50 0 0	Mr Wilks, M.P.
Peveril of the Peak.....	42 0 0	Mr Cochran.
Waverley.....	18 0 0	Mr Wilks, M.P.
The Abbot.....	14 0 0	{ Messrs Poole & Edwards.
Ivanhoe.....	12 0 0	Mr Rumbold, M.P.
The Pirate.....	12 0 0	Mr Molteno.
Fortunes of Nigel.....	16 16 0	Mr J. Bain.
Kenilworth.....	17 0 0	Mr Wilks, M.P.
Bride of Lammermoor...	14 14 0	Captain Basil Hall.
£317 0 0		

A second collection of Scott's manuscripts was sold by private bargain to Cadell on November 9, 1833. These were the property of David Constable, advocate, son of the publisher, and consisted of the poems already mentioned as belonging to his father. In addition Cadell purchased the early letters of Scott in five quarto volumes (1796-1832). The price he paid for the letters was £105, and for the poems only £60, which contrasts strongly with the price recently brought by the *Lady of the Lake*, but which had evidently been regulated by the poor prices of the sale in 1831.

Guy Mannering, here bought on commission for Mr Heber, was resold in 1836 for £63, and was bought, it is said, for the Duke of Devonshire. It was sold at Sotheby's in 1880, 'forming a select portion of Lord Clare's books,' and brought £390. It is understood to have gone to America. *Rob Roy*, resold in 1847, was bought by Cadell and presented to Lockhart, and changed hands three years ago, as we have said, for £600. Another fragment of the *Bride of Lammermoor* was in the hands of Christopher Douglas in 1871; David Laing had a fragment of the *Legend of Montrose* at the same date; the *Monastery*, bought for Heber as above, passed into the hands of Sir Thomas Phillips, Middlehill, Worcestershire, for £45, 3s.; the *Abbot*, as will afterwards be seen, passed into the hands of John Murray; *Kenilworth*, bought at the Wilks sale in 1847 by Peter Cunningham for £16, was resold in 1855, and bought for the British Museum; the *Pirate* is in the hands of the widow of the Rev. Dr R. H. Stevenson, Edinburgh, second eldest daughter of Cadell; *Peveril*, bought on commission in 1831 for Mr E. V. Uttersson, passed into the hands of Sir W. Tite.

The manuscript of the *Pirate* has the following note on the flyleaf in Cadell's handwriting (1834): 'A part of this, the original manuscript of the *Pirate*, purchased by me at the auction on 19th August, 1831. What makes it complete I received from Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford, on 9th April 1831.' The three volumes are bound in one, and eight pages are wanting. We are indebted for this and several other important facts to Cadell's grandson, Mr J. H. Stevenson, advocate, Edinburgh.

Mr Robert Cadell, successor to Constable as Scott's publisher, had twenty-seven manuscript volumes, bound in full leather, with his crest in an oval ribbon on each side—a stag's head and the motto, *Vigilantia non cadet*. These he kept in a cabinet in his publishing office, 31 St Andrew Square, Edinburgh. Of the poetical works Cadell had *Marmion*, *Lady of the Lake*, *Don Roderick* and *Field of Waterloo*, *Rokeby*, *Lord of the Isles*, *Introduction to Popular Poetry*, *Halidon Hill*, &c. He had in 1835 also twelve of the Waverley Novels—namely, *Old Mortality*, *Abbot*, *Pirate*, *Quentin Durward*, *St Ronan's Well*, *Redgauntlet*, *Tales of the Crusaders*, *Woodstock*, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, *Anne of Geierstein*, *Count Robert of Paris*, and *Castle Dangerous*, the last of which was in

Mr and Mrs Laidlaw's handwriting. Of two fragmentary volumes, one contained about a volume of *Ivanhoe* with a small portion of *Waverley*, and the other a portion of *Tales of a Grandfather*. There were also five volumes of original letters (1796-1832).

In the same cabinet there was an interleaved set of the whole series of the *Waverley Novels* in thirty-two volumes, containing the new prefaces and annotations—the suggestion of Constable (which proved such a success) at last carried out. This, we believe, is now in the hands of Messrs A. & C. Black. The Abbotsford edition cost more than £40,000 to produce. From 1829, when the novels came into Cadell's hands, until his death in 1849, as we have seen, the sale of Scott's works never slackened; while he paid no less a sum than £37,000 for Scott's copyrights before he had them under his wing, and not £8500 as stated in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His own fortune of £130,000 was mainly earned by the sale of Scott's works. The profits gained have been set down at £300,000.

A writer (from internal evidence, apparently Mr

Robert Chambers), who saw Cadell's manuscript volumes, and described them in *Chambers's Journal* for 1835, was struck, as every one has been, by the neatness and uniformity of the handwriting and the absence of blotting and interlineation. In *Ivanhoe* especially he noted that there was as much manuscript as would fill five printed pages without a single correction, or even the appearance of a slip of the pen. The songs introduced seemed to have been struck off with the same easy grace as the connecting narrative. In the manuscript of the poems, the battle of Flodden, in *Marmion*, with its fiery, galloping verse, seemed also, so far as the handwriting showed anything, to have flowed as easily as the rest of the poem. Some of the manuscripts bore evidence of having been sent by post, in considerable portions at a time, and, as the postmark showed, from different parts of the country. The beginning of *Marmion*, with its description of a Scottish pastoral winter, addressed from Ashestiel to Mr Stewart Rose, was actually sent from London under a frank from the then Marquis of Abercorn.

JOHN BURNET OF BARNES.

CHAPTER III.—THE SPATE IN THE TWEED.



THE year 1683 was with us the driest year in any man's memory. From the end of April to the end of July we had scarce a shower. The hay-harvest was ruined beyond repair, and man and beast were sick with the sultry days. It was on the last Monday of July that I, wearied with wandering listlessly about the house, bethought myself of riding to Peebles to see the great match at bowls which is played every year for the silver horn. I had no expectation of a keen game, for the green was sure to be well-nigh ruined with the sun, and men had lost spirit in such weather. But the faintest interest is better than purposeless idleness, so I roused myself from languor and set out.

I saddled Maisie the younger—this is a family name among our horses—and rode down by the Tweed-side to the town. The river ran in the midst of a great bed of sun-baked gravel, a little trickle that a man might step across. When I came to the Manor Pool I stood still in wonder, for there for the first time in my life I saw the stream dry. Manor, which is in winter a roaring torrent and at other times a clear, full stream, had not a drop of running water in its bed—naught but a few stagnant pools green with slime. It was a grateful change to escape from the sun into the coolness of the Neidpath woods; but even there a change was seen, for the ferns hung their fronds wearily, and the moss had lost all its greenness. When once more I came out to the sun, its beating on my face was so fierce that it almost burned, and

I was glad when I came to the town and the shade of tree and dwelling.

The bowling-green of Peebles, which is one of the best in the country, lies at the west end of the High Street, at the back of the Castle Hill. The turf had been kept with constant waterings, but notwithstanding it looked gray and withered. Here I found half the men-folk of Peebles assembled, and many from the villages near, to see the match, which is the greatest event of the month. Each player wore a riband of a special colour. Most of them had stripped off their coats and jerkins to give their arms free-play, and some of the best were busied in taking counsel with their friends as to the lie of the green. The landlord of the 'Cross-keys' was there, with a great red favour stuck in his hat, looking, as I thought, too fat and rubicund a man to have a steady eye. Near him was Peter Crustcrackit the tailor, a little wiry man, with legs bent from sitting cross-legged, thin active hands, and keen eyes, well used to the sewing of fine work. Then there were carters and shepherds, stout fellows with bronzed faces and great muscular chests; and the miller of the Wauk-mill, who was reported the best bowl-player in the town. Some of the folk had come down, like myself, merely to watch, and among them I saw Andrew Greenlees the surgeon, who had tended me what time I went over the cauld. A motley crowd of the odds and ends of the place hung around or sat on the low wall—poachers and black-fishers and all the riff-raff of the town.

The jack was set, the order of the game arranged,

and the play commenced. For some time I watched the players. Then, when the game no longer amused me, I fell to looking over the country, down to the edge of the water, where the small thatched cottages were yellow in the heat, and away up the broad, empty channel of the Tweed.

Even as I looked I saw a strange thing on the river-bank, which chained my languid curiosity. For down the haugh, swinging along at a great pace, came a man the like of whom I had seldom seen. He ran at a steady trot, more like a horse than a human creature, with his arms set close by his sides, and without bonnet or shoes. His head swung from side to side as with excessive weariness, and even at that distance I could see how he panted. In a trice he was over Peebles Water and had ascended the bank to the bowling-green, cleared the low dike, and stood gaping before us. Now I saw him plainer, and I have rarely seen a stranger sight. He seemed to have come a great distance, but no sweat stood on his brow; only a dun copper colour marked the effect of the hot sun. His breeches were utterly ragged, and in places showed his long supple limbs. A shock of black hair covered his head and shaded his swarthy face. His eyes were wild and keen as a hawk's, and his tongue hung out of his mouth like a dog's in a chase. Every man stopped his play and looked at the queer new-comer. A whisper went round the place that it was that 'fule callant frae Brochtoun;' but this brought no information to me.

The man sat still for maybe three minutes with his eyes fixed on the ground as if to recover breath. Then he got up with dazed glances, like one wakening from sleep. He stared at me, then at the players, and burst into his tale, speaking in a high, excited voice.

'I hae run frae Drummeller to bring ye word. Quick, and get the folk out o' the waterside hooses, or the feck o' the toun 'll be soomin' to Berwick in an 'oor.'

No one spoke, but all stared as if they took him for a madman.

'There's been an awfu' storm up i' the muirs,' he went on panting, 'and Tweed's comin' down like a mill-race. The herd o' Pownood telt me, and I got twa 'oors start o' t, and cam' off here what I could rin. Get the folk out o' the waterside hooses when I bid ye, wi' a' their gear and plenishing, or there 'll no' be sae muckle as a goat's worth left by nicht. Up wi' ye and haste, for there's nae time to lose. I heard the roar o' the water miles off, louder than ony thunderstorm, and mair terrible than an army wi' banners. Quick, ye auld doited bodies, if ye dinna want to hae mourning and lamentation i' the toun o' Peebles!'

At this, as you may believe, a great change passed over all. Some made no words about it, but rushed into the town to give the alarm; others stared stupidly, as if waiting for more news; while some were disposed to treat the whole matter as a hoax. This enraged the newbearer beyond telling.

Springing up, he pointed to the western sky, and far off we saw a thick blackness creeping up the skyline. 'If ye 'll no' believe me,' said he, 'will ye believe the finger o' God?' The word and the sight convinced the most distrusting.

Now the Tweed, unlike all other rivers of my knowledge, rises terribly at the first rain, and travels slowly, so that Tweedsmuir may be under five feet of water and Peebles high and dry. This makes the whole valley a place of exceeding danger in sultry weather, for no man knows when a thunderstorm may break in the hills and send the stream down a raging torrent. This, too, makes it possible to hear word of a flood before it comes, and, by God's grace, to provide against it.

The green was soon deserted. I rushed down to the waterside houses, which were in the nearest peril, and in shorter time than it takes to tell we had the people out, with as much of their belongings as were worth the saving. Then we hastened to the low-lying cottages on Tweed Green, and did likewise. Some of the folk seemed willing to resist, because, as they said, 'Wha kenned but that the body micht be a leear, and they werena to hae a' this wark for naething?' For the great floods were but a tradition, and only the old men had seen the ruin which the spate could work. Nevertheless, even these were convinced by a threatening sky and a few words from the newbearer's trenchant tongue. Soon the High Street and the wynds were thick with household belongings, and the Castle Hill was crowded with folk to see the coming of the flood.

By this time the grim line of black had grown over half the sky, and down fell great drops of rain into the white, sun-baked channel. It was strange to watch these mighty splashes falling into the little stagnant pools and the runlets of flowing water. And still the close, thick heat hung over all, and men looked at the dawns of a storm with sweat running over their brows. With the rain came a mist, a white, ghastly haze, which obliterated the hills and came down nigh to the stream. A sound, too, grew upon our ears, at first far away and dim, but increasing till it became a dull, hollow thunder, varied with a strange crackling, swishing noise which made a man eerie to listen to. Then all of a sudden the full blast of the thing came upon us. Men held their breaths as the wind and rain choked them and drove them back. It was scarce possible to see far before, but the outlines of the gorge of Neidpath fleeted through the drift, whence the river issued. Every man turned his eyes thither and strained them to pierce the gloom.

Suddenly, round the corner of the hill, appeared a great yellow wave crested with white foam and filling the whole space. Down it came, roaring and hissing, mowing the pines by the waterside as a reaper mows down hay with a scythe. Then with a mighty bound it broke from the hill-barriers and spread over the haugh. Now the sound was like

the bubbling of a pot ere it boils. We watched it in terror and admiration as it swept on its awful course. In a trice it was at the cauld, and the cauld disappeared under a whirl of foam; now it was on the houses, and the walls went in like nut-shells and the rubble was borne onward. A cry got up of 'The bridge!' and all hung in wonder as it neared the old stonework, the first barrier to the torrent's course, the brave bridge of Peebles. It flung itself on it with fiendish violence, but the stout masonwork stood firm, and the boiling tide went on through the narrow arches, leaving the bridge standing unshaken, as it had stood against many a flood. As we looked, we one and all broke into a cheer in honour of the masons who had made so trusty a piece of work.

I found myself in the crowd of spectators standing next to the man who had brought the tidings. He had recovered his breath and was watching the sight with a look half of interest and half of vexation. When all was past, and only the turbid river remained, he shook himself like a dog and made to elbow his way out. 'I maun be off,' he said, speaking to himself, 'and a sair job I'll hae gettin' ower Lyne Water.' When I heard him I turned round and confronted him. There was something so pleasing about his face, his keen eyes and alert head, that I could not forbear from

offering him my hand and telling him of my admiration for his deed. I was still but a boy, and he was clearly some years my elder, so I made the advance, I doubt not, with a certain shyness and hesitancy. He looked at me sharply and smiled.

'Ye're the young laird o' Barns,' said he. 'I ken ye weel, though ye maybe are no acquaint wi' me. I'm muckle honoured, sir; and gin ye'll come Brochtoun-ways some time and speir for Nicol Plenderleith, he'll tak' ye to burns that were never fished afore and hills that never heard the sound o' a shot.'

I thanked him, and watched him slipping through the crowd till he was lost to view. This was my first meeting with Nicol Plenderleith, of whose ways and doings this tale shall have much to say. The glamour of the strange fellow was still upon me as I set myself to make my road home. I am almost ashamed to tell of my misfortunes; for after crossing the bridge and riding to Manor Water, I found that this stream likewise had risen and had not left a bridge in its whole course. So I had to go up as far as St Gordian's Cross before I could win over it, and did not reach Barns till after midnight, where I found my father half-crazy with concern for me, and Tam Todd making ready to go and seek me.

SEA-GIRT SOCOTRA.



OCOTRA is neither a large nor a commercially important island. Its position, however, on the highway between the Mediterranean and India, and the Far East generally, gives it other claims to fame or notoriety. Situated as it is where the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean combine their waters, Socotra is an important landmark for vessels navigating those seaways. It lies some 220 miles from the Arabian coast and 150 from Cape Guardafui, and may be regarded, in fact, as a sort of outpost to that African headland, whose bold and forbidding character forms such an appropriate finial to the rugged and dreary tracts of sunburnt Somali-land. Seen at a distance from the deck of some liner, Socotra forms a picture at once beautiful and impressive. The island approximates in shape to that of an elongated ellipse, being some 70 miles long and 22 in width, with the major axis running from east to west. Surrounding the coast-line at varying distances from it are numerous reefs, many of them altogether submerged, but still sufficiently near the surface to give evidence of their whereabouts by intercepting and converting into a tumbling mass of white, broken water the heavy swell which ever sweeps upon some part or other of the coast. Beyond the broken surf-line there lies in some parts a sandy beach, in others a bold and

rock-strewn shore, which affords a fair index to the inhospitable character of the island itself. But these low-lying regions are of no great extent. They form a sort of girdle round the island proper, for they vary in width from two to four miles, and beyond them rises in grand abruptness the volcanic peaks which form the real Socotra. These, viewed from a passing vessel, with all their repellent features shrouled in purple mist rising skyward from a deep-blue sea, relieved with the white line of broken water, form a picture which, once seen, is never forgotten. A closer inspection of the island, however, discloses numerous ravines or wadys of varying degrees of fertility, permitting communication with the high lands of the interior. Here dwell the nomads who constitute a considerable proportion of the population. Their mode of life does not differ much from that of other nomadic Arabs, their flocks and herds supplying them with the necessities and the means of securing a considerable proportion of the population. Their mode of life does not differ much from that of other nomadic Arabs, their flocks and herds supplying them with the necessities and the means of securing a considerable proportion of the population. Their mode of life does not differ much from that of other nomadic Arabs, their flocks and herds supplying them with the necessities and the means of securing a considerable proportion of the population.

But the seaways surrounding Socotra are, in view of the enormous volume of traffic which navigates them, of quite equal interest with the island itself. The granite mass of Socotra rises with an approach

to abruptness from the sea-bed. In fact, the average depth of the sea-floor upon which Socotra rests may be put down at 1000 fathoms, while seawards from the eastern extremity a depth of 2000 fathoms is rapidly reached. The surface-water about the island drifts in directions which vary with the prevalent winds, and it is the imperfectly understood direction and force of these currents which constitute not the least danger which the island offers to the navigator.

Generally speaking, but two winds are known at Socotra—one from the north-east and the other from the south-west. These are the seasonal aerial movements called the monsoons; and it will be readily understood that these winds are capable of producing oceanic currents which, eddying round Socotra and deflected from the African and Arabian coasts, will produce a variable drift which may carry a vessel miles from her assumed course. It is during the prevalence of the south-west monsoon that Socotra is most dangerous. Then the superheated lands of Asia have superincumbent to them a hot, and consequently rare, atmosphere; and to compensate for this extensive region of low barometric pressure steady winds of increasing force blow in from the south-west. Naturally these winds will attain to their maximum strength during the months of June and July. Coming, too, as they do, from the regions of the southern winter, and crossing an expanse of ocean, they supply all the requirements necessary to enshroud with mist and bathe in a copious rainfall any high lands which intercept them. This monsoon is sometimes called on this account the *wet* monsoon; while, from the force of the wind as compared with the more trifling aerial disturbance produced by the north-east seasonal wind, it is frequently alluded to as the monsoon simply. But perhaps the worst source of danger which this monsoon brings to the navigator is the obscuration of the heavenly bodies by a partially-condensed moisture resulting from the admixture of atmospheres of different temperatures. Thus it is no uncommon experience for a ship making a voyage across the Arabian Sea to be for four days at a stretch unable to obtain an observation.

This implies, of course, great uncertainty as to the vessel's position; and if we add to this the strong winds and heavy seas encountered, and the fact that the surface-drifts are exceedingly variable, it is quite easy to understand that a shipmaster may be carried far out of his course, and that without knowing it. Some such weather-conditions as these doubtless obtained when the *Aden* made her last and fatal voyage from Colombo. Of course it may be urged that, knowing the track as commander and officers would, the disaster should not have happened. But, as we have already shown, the risk factors would be of the greatest. Monthly current-charts of the Indian Ocean, compiled by the Meteorological Office and based upon observations extending over a long period of years, show during the month of June no less than three distinct currents running in

different directions between Guardafui and Socotra. Add to these adverse factors the probability that the island was approached during a dark or misty night, and it would have been matter for wonder had the vessel escaped the treacherous reefs that line the coast. But apart from the question of professional failure to avoid Socotra, it must be admitted that the tragedy enacted on the doomed ship brings out into bold relief the sterling self-sacrificing bravery of the British sailors. Of the navigational staff not one has escaped, so far as is known, to tell the official story of the disaster. They died where British sailors never fear to face death—at the post of duty, striving to save the lives of those entrusted to their care. And shortly before the *Aden* was battered to pieces by the fearful seas which swept over her, an equally horrible tragedy of the sea had been enacted but a few miles away. A pilgrim ship, the *Sultan*, bound for India, was overwhelmed by the fury of the monsoon; and had not the *Valetta*, an Australian mail-boat, appeared upon the scene, not a soul would have escaped to tell the tale.

Although the perils of this ocean route are so materially augmented by the interposition of Socotra, and though England has had a vested interest in the island since 1877, and a real stake since 1886, when it practically became a British possession, little or nothing has been done to safeguard from its dangers the enormous tide of shipping which sweeps past its shores. Of this commerce the traffic passing through the Suez Canal may be taken as the approximate measure, and this amounts in a single year to about 3500 vessels of a net tonnage of about eight and a half million tons, of which over seventy per cent. is British. There is thus every reason for the provision of warning lights and fog-signals upon the island of Socotra. And this obligation is strengthened by the fact that a very considerable number of the British vessels navigating the Gulf of Aden have a large passenger-list. Of course it will be maintained by some that ships should give Socotra a wide berth; that there is abundant sea-room for a vessel to avoid the island altogether, and thus run no risk whatever, &c. Man, however, may propose to avoid Socotra, but the uncontrollable forces of wind and sea may dispose otherwise, as they did in the *Aden* case. Besides, if Socotra is not to have light-warnings because vessels need not sight the island, the same argument would be equally applicable against the majority of lighthouse and fog-signal erections. But it is not only sea-girt Socotra which requires bringing into line with the requirements of the times; the shores of the Gulf of Aden also need additional warnings. The straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, though less the 'Gate of Tears' than they were in bygone times, are none the less a place of great peril to the navigator, as, in fact, is the southern section of the Red Sea generally. During the past twelve years over seventy disasters have occurred to British vessels either in the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden, adjacent to the

dreaded straits. Many of these casualties were strandings of a trivial character, the vessels getting off without having sustained much damage. A study of these cases shows that the chief cause of catastrophe was the unknown currents. Quite recently the unlucky *Oratava*, the steamer which capsized in a London dock, went ashore some twenty-five miles from Perim; and for services rendered the Admiralty Court made an award of £11,000—a sum which shows how serious is the risk a vessel runs by stranding upon a Red Sea coral reef. Currents, of course, are encountered by night as well as day, and it would therefore be almost an impossibility to spend too much money in lighting the shores, insular and continental, of the Gulf of Aden and

the Red Sea. A reliable light and fog-signal on Socotra would prove of inestimable value, for in fair weather and foul mariners would not only be warned off the rock-girt coast, but they would also be enabled to fix their position, and so pursue the remainder of their voyage with a more accurate knowledge of their exact whereabouts. Up to the present Socotra has not proved of much use to England. Commercially it never can, for, with the exception of aloes, it produces little or nothing. Strategically it has a potential use; but were a good lighthouse erected upon it, Socotra would become a friend instead of a foe to the mariner, and a valuable link in the chain that connects us with India and our other possessions in the eastern hemisphere.

THE GURNARD ROCK.

CHAPTER II.



ON Monday morning the news was brought to Gabriel Lowry that the Porthillian man was waiting for him on the pier; and Lowry walked down the street with a following of many men and boys, and a few of the coarser women of the place.

The stranger sat at the end of the pier placidly smoking. Lowry advanced towards him, and the expectant crowd fell behind in a half-circle.

'So you 'm come?' said Tregenna, calmly knocking the ashes from his pipe.

'Iss, I've come,' answered Lowry.

'An' you've brought a purty tribe at your tail,' continued the other, glancing contemptuously at the crowd.

'I didn't bring 'em; they comed,' said Lowry sullenly.

'Hearken to me, Gabriel Lowry,' said the Porthillian man, rising to his feet; 'tis a likely day for the mackerel, an' my mates'll be busy. Good fishin', as thee knawst, comes o' the Lord's bounty; but fightin' is a fule's job, an' can be had any day; so, with your favour, us'll fish to-day an' fight to-morrow.'

'Any time,' answered Lowry; 'tis no odds to me.'

'An' look here, my man,' continued Tregenna. 'I've got a wife an' two children in Porthillian, an' 'tisn't fitty for me to be makin' a shaw an' a shame of myself before a passel o' St Budoc good-for-norts. I warn't fight 'ee here with these gaping fules around us; but I'll meet 'ee man to man, us two together, an' us'll fight it out quiet to ourselves.'

'Anywheres,' assented Lowry.

'Twill be low-water on the Gurnard Rock to-morrow forenoon—us shan't be interfered with there. If you're man enough you'll meet me on the Gurnard, an' us'll fight out this quarrel to the finish.'

'I'll meet 'ee,' responded Lowry.

'I'll be here with my boat to-morrow morning: wan boat's enough for two men, though they'm adversaries. I'll take 'ee to the Gurnard, an' I'll bring 'ee back—what's left of 'ee.'

'So be it,' said Lowry.

Tregenna swung himself lightly from the pier, and dropped into his boat. With a few strokes he put a stretch of water between himself and the disappointed crowd of St Budocians; then, staying his oars for a moment, he called back to Lowry:

'The Gurnard Rock!'

'The Gurnard Rock!' echoed Lowry.

'To-morrow forenoon—I'll be here with my boat for 'ee in the morning.'

'Right!' shouted Lowry.

He looked strangely handsome, this yellow-bearded Porthillian fellow; there was a fascination in his face, and he spoke throughout the brief parley in a tone of good-humoured disdain.

Lowry watched him as he rowed out to the little fleet of fishing-boats; and he repented in his heart that he had struck the man.

The little pier at St Budoc was built in 1755, by Lady Deborah Polperro, to the glory of God and the pious memory of her father, Sir Reginald Polperro, for the protection of the fishing-vessels from the waves of the Atlantic. This was originally inscribed upon the granite, but the waves of the Atlantic resented the inscription, and long ago washed it out; they have as yet, however, failed in their frequent attempts to wash away the structure itself.

St Budoc is a gossip town, where a communal publicity is given to everybody's private affairs, and the pier is its favourite meeting-place, its forum and its lounge. The stones of the parapet are worn and polished by the elbows and haunches of the generations. The children sprawl prone

upon this wide sea-wall, and swop marbles and play at knuckle-dibs; the youths and hobble-de-hoys sit thereon and dangle their legs, and the kicking of heels for a century and a half has worn irregular furrows on the granite; men of graver years will lean upon the wall in a solemn row, and meditatively smoke their pipes; and on fine days old, vacant-eyed men will crawl hither on two sticks, and stare significantly seaward.

The pier juts south, with an extension that trends to the south-east, and in the angle a large block had been dislodged by a storm, leaving a chair-like niche, which by general consent was the privileged seat of Captain John Johns—locally 'Cap'n Jan Jans,' intimately and affectionately 'Old Jansie.'

Captain Johns, retired master of a coasting-schooner, was a short, stoutish man, with a puckered face, a jovial mouth, and gray-blue eyes that looked kindly on the world and found it humorous in the main. He had an encyclopædic knowledge of maritime matters, and could be profitably consulted on anything from an equinoctial gale to the price of a new tar-brush. If a man desired to forecast the weather, the simpler and better way was to ask Captain Johns, the alternative being to consult the barometer at the 'Compass.' This instrument, by the way, was responsible for much of the drinking habits of the fishermen, every reference to it being accompanied by a mug of cider; and on thirsty days the fluctuation of the mercury was a matter of absorbing interest. It is a saying in St Budoc when a man staggers with liquor that the 'brometer's purty low.'

It was Tuesday morning, and there were many loungers on the pier, for a fisherman's leisure falls at strange times. Sea and sky were blue with an Italian blueness, and a week's placidity had given a phenomenal clearness to the water, which on this clean coast of rock is translucent fathoms down.

The great topic of conversation was the impending fight. There was at first a strong feeling of resentment at the conditions of privacy, which some considered an unwarrantable infringement of their proper and natural rights as spectators; but the strange compact and the idea of this fight between the two men on a desolate rock was full of romantic possibilities that stimulated the imagination and compensated somewhat for the disappointment. Gossip had already, in local phrase, 'made wonders' of the coming combat. It was to be no mere bout of fisticuffs, but something gladiatorial in fierceness and result. All the rivalry and animosity between St Budoc and Porthillian would culminate in this supreme encounter; and Porthillian was to be licked.

'What do 'ee think of this yer fight, Cap'n Jan?' said old Caleb Hocken the sailmaker.

Captain Johns gravely shook his head. 'I don't like it. 'Tis onnatural and onseemly for they two poor sawls to be a-lerrupin' one another like haythen on thicky rock, with niver a man to see

fair and enjye the sport; to my mind 'tis most onrighteous.'

'Will 'em fight fair with their fistis?' asked Jacob Trewarne (an absurd rumour of weapons was abroad); 'or will there be shootin' or knivin'? I hope there warn't be any foreign iniquity o' that kind.'

'All fighting's bad,' said Polreggan, who had vainly attempted to avert the combat by remonstrating with Gabriel Lowry.

'An' yet there's some rare good fightin' in the Scriptur,' argued Nick Maddern the tinker. He was a gipsy-looking fellow, with silver rings on his brown fingers, and was commonly suspected of rank unbelief.

'Iss, an' some rare good fishing,' responded Polreggan; 'but the fighting's wan end, an' the fishing's t'other, an' I reckon 'tis only the fishing that consarns a man's sawl.'

'As for Scriptur' fightin',' said Joe Kevern, 'they fought for their awn 'ginst their nat'ral enemies; an' when a Porthillian scum comes here an' catches our fish an' rips our nets, what is 'a, so to spake, but a durned Amalekite?'

'Us musn't take the Scriptur' too literal,' said Captain Johns solemnly; 'that's the mistake old Cap'n Jarvis made. He was mazed wi' drink, an' he imagined in his fulishness that he was King Saul, an' he made Billy the boy stand before 'en and play upon the 'cordian. "I'm mortal sorry there isn't a javelin aboard," says he, "but us must steer as near the Scriptur' as us can;" and wi' that he flinged a handspike at Billy the boy. Now if old Cap'n Jarvis hadn't a-been so durned partic'lar literal he might ha' been sailing the salt say to this day, instead of which he's beached high and dry in Bodmin Asylum.'

'I was niver in a fight myself,' said Calab Hocken, a diminutive, wizened man, 'but I wrestled wanse to Tregartha fair. They matched me 'ginst Anak Varkar—his name warn't rightly Anak, but they called 'en Anak in sport, on account of the stature of 'en—though to my mind 'tisn't fitty to sport wi' Bible names—an' Anak catched me by the 'slack, an' shaked me like a boy shakes a rabbit; an' he calls to old Moll Trevance the fish-woman, "Spread wide thy apern, Moll; yer's a purty little man for 'ee.'"

'The only fit wrastlin' for thee, Uncle Caleb,' said one of the younger men, 'is the wrastlin' o' the sperrit.'

'Trew, trew,' replied the old fellow, with some pride; 'I'm mortal cripply in the back an' limbs; but I was always reckoned terrible strong in supplication.'

At this point there was a cry of 'Yer he comes!' and all eyes were turned to the approaching boat of the Porthillian fisherman.

It must be confessed that the people of St Budoc did not give the stranger a very chivalrous reception. The boys wasted howls upon him long before he was within hail, and when he brought

his boat to the pier-steps he was greeted with a tumult of jeers and denunciations. There were some women of the rougher sort in the crowd, and these were loudest in their maledictions. They flung fish-heads at the man, and epithets that were worse than fish-heads. They derided his birthplace and flung aspersions on his origin. They would gladly have ridiculed his personal appearance, but the fellow was unassailably handsome, and it was a poor expedient to prophecy that he 'widden' look so purty when he comed back.'

As for John Tregenna, he minded their abuse and execrations as little as he heeded the water that dripped from his oars. There was laughter in his eyes as he dodged the fish-offal that never struck him, and he looked up at the crowded row of his assailants with a smile that was half amusement and half disdain.

There was a noisy ovation for Gabriel Lowry as he walked along the beach to the pier, looking stalwart and fit, with an appropriate scowl upon his face. They made a lane for him, and patted him boisterously on the back as he passed to the pier-head; and their fragments of pugilistic counsel were numerous and varied.

'Doan't 'ee spare the toad!' cried one woman, red-faced and raw-elbowed.

'Smite 'en hearty, my sonny, an' be spry with 'en,' said Ned Trewithey the ropemaker.

'He's weightier than thee, Gabe; spar round nimble, and he warn't last!' counselled Nick Maddern.

Perhaps this fistic advice found its highest expression in the impromptu couplet of Captain Johns:

'Hit 'en awft,
And doan't 'ee hit 'en sawft,'

which was afterwards remembered and quoted as a saying of some brilliancy.

To do Gabriel justice, it must be recorded that he ignored these encouragements of his friends, and resented their treatment of his adversary. He

turned for a moment as he descended the pier-steps, and cried fiercely to the rabble of women who were simultaneously vociferous as he passed: 'Git 'long home—the whole pack of 'ee!'

As Lowry stepped into the boat Tregenna greeted him with a nod, and said quietly, 'You take the tiller,' and ducked his head at a missile of mackerel, which struck the other in the face.

They were strangely in contrast: Lowry sullen and dark of face, Tregenna yellow-bearded and debonair, looking absolutely joyous in the morning sunshine. The heart of more than one woman secretly changed sides as she watched the man.

Tregenna took the oars and pulled away from the pier amid cheers and hootings—the latter being his share of the mingled valediction.

They were some hundred yards from the shore, when a tall figure broke frantically through the crowd and climbed the sea-wall; a gaunt old man with a ragged white beard and a long-tailed black coat. It was Malachi Praz, the wayside preacher, known in the mining villages as 'Old Wrath-to-come' on account of the fervour of his denunciations; a worthy, half-demented creature, whose picturesque utterances were not without attraction to certain of the rougher people.

He stood on the very edge of the parapet beneath the lantern at the pier-head, and gesticulating wildly with his long arms, cried aloud: 'Turn back, turn back, ye that smite with the fist o' wickedness!' But the boat sped on.

'Turn back!' shrieked Malachi at the top of his voice; 'turn back before your hands be defiled wi' blid and your fingers with iniquity—turn back, ye evil-doers!'

But the boat continued its course, and the evil-doers were beyond hail of imprecation or entreaty.

Lowry steered south-west, and as the boat turned, his eyes sought a certain whitewashed cottage on the slope beyond the coastguard station; and behind the fuchsia hedge he caught the glimpse of a white sun-bonnet and the flutter of a handkerchief.

RARE AND PECULIAR DRUGS.



HERE Wayland Smith at this day in want of the particular drug without which his electuary, to act as antidote to the 'Manna of St Nicholas,' taken in the sturgeon-sauce by the Earl of Sussex, was useless—and

which the apothecaries of Fleet Street either knew nothing about or were sceptical of the existence of—he would probably not have occasion to hunt up any obscure Jew chemist for it, nor exercise the passage of wit, or quackery, he found necessary in obtaining it from Zacharias Yoglan. Probably nowadays it would be widely advertised as a patent medicine, warranted to cure a greater list

of ills than ever the farrier of the Vale of the White Horse thought flesh heir to. And the quack of to-day, if in possessing it he has not himself attained the 'Elixir of Life,' yet succeeds pretty well in persuading his patients that they may buy it of him; and, in their keenly-aroused faith, will have succeeded, any way, in the second main aim of his ancestral humbug, the alchemist—the ready handling of much gold.

The chemist of to-day is a much less picturesque individual than his mediæval prototype, and the bulk of his orthodox trade far more commonplace in character. The mass of drugs nowadays, including, fortunately, most of those of proved value—

senna, squills, quinine, and so forth—are cheap enough; still, there are yet to be found in his shop a few rare and peculiar ones, around which the imagination and philosophical speculation can have some amount of room for play. A fair indication of this rarity is, naturally, to be found in price; and the layman, running through the items in the price-list of a druggist, could easily pick the rare ones out by remembering this fact alone. Why they should be so is another, and oftentimes interesting, matter.

Saffron, for instance, would strike an ordinary observer as decidedly expensive at fifty-six shillings a pound, until told that it is composed of the central small portions only of the flowers of a species of crocus, seventy thousand of which it takes to yield the material for one pound. The wonder then becomes that it is so cheap, that it can pay to grow and gather at the price. As a matter of fact it has failed to pay the English grower—by this retaining, in the name of his town of Saffron-Walden, but a hint of former importance in this particular direction; French and Spanish soils being more suitable to the full growth of the flowers, and foreign labour cheaper in the work of picking. Its use in medicine has practically died out, bar perhaps the popular belief that, steeped in hot milk or cider, it helps the eruption of measles to fully appear. As a dye in creaming curtains, and to give a rich appearance to cake, it is still, however, in general demand; for which purpose it is well suited, in being both harmless and strong, one grain, composed of the style and stigmas of nine flowers, being sufficient to give a distinct yellow tint to ten gallons of water. Its high price, by the way, has led to a peculiar form of adulteration; for, apart from the crude and commonplace one of dusting with a heavy powder, such as gypsum, to give weight, the similar portions of other and commoner flowers have been specially dyed and worked thoroughly in amongst the genuine ones.

Of similar origin, though chosen for scent in lieu of colour, are the essential oils of many flowers; and easily first of these must rank that of the rose, known commonly as otto, or attar, of roses. Roses being so common, it may be imagined how small the yield of oil must be to account for a quoted price of thirty-six shillings an ounce, or £28 odd per pound; and this to the chemist himself. What it resolves itself into as a retail price is hardly worth going into, as a retail demand—beyond an occasional drop at sixpence upon a handkerchief, upon a special occasion—is unknown; its chief use being in scenting powders and the making up of fancy compound scents. Ten thousand pounds—or nearly five tons—of roses it takes to obtain one pound of the oil. These are distilled with twice their bulk of water, and the otto skimmed—very carefully skimmed—off the surface of the distillate in the receiving vessel. The adulterator has again here a field for action—which he avails himself of—in

distilling a proportion of geranium flowers, the oil of which has a somewhat similar rosy smell, with the roses; this paying, in that it takes but the comparatively humble number of five hundred geranium flowers to yield a pound of their oil. Constantinople being a port of shipment, sailors, after their usual amiable weakness of being swindled, buy cheaply there, for presentation to appreciative wives and sweethearts at home, long, narrow, gilded bottles of supposed otto of roses; in reality, bottles which the genuine article has been poured into, and out again, and then filled with a clear, scentless oil of the same appearance and specific gravity as the true; the few remaining drops, clinging to the interior of the bottle, being strong enough to convince the smelling buyer that he has got the right thing on the spot.

Another peculiar—and at a sovereign an ounce rare—vegetable drug, though less harmless and pleasant than those already mentioned, is curare—the arrow-poison of the South American Indian. Very powerful it is as a death-dealer in the rough subcutaneous method of administration, smeared over an arrow-head, of the native exploiters, though it is said to be harmless when not taken directly into the circulation; the natives, at any rate, eat freely of the bodies of animals killed by its means. As a medicine it has been advocated and used as an antidote to strychnine poisoning—setting a thief to catch a thief, this, with a vengeance.

If peculiarity be held to include strength as a poison, we can safely add strychnine, with a dose of one-twentieth, and atropine, the active principle of deadly-nightshade, with that of one-sixtieth, of a grain. Small doses; but the palm must be given, as the very strongest poison, to one yet more powerful, in the shape of aconitine, an alkaloid extracted from the root of monkshood, with the phenomenally small dose of one-six-hundredth of a grain. Being so very small, we can well afford to look with equanimity at the price—£27 per ounce; and a drug firm, in however big a way of business, would probably look twice at, and require confirmation of, an order from any chemist customer for a pound.

‘How are these small doses certified to be of the exact strength prescribed?’ will perhaps, and naturally enough, be asked. In the case of a soluble drug the answer is of course plain, for a handleable quantity has simply to be dissolved in a certain quantity of water and the solution suitably divided. In the case of its not being soluble, the function of the water is fulfilled by a bulky, inert powder, such as a liquorice powder or sugar of milk, with which it is thoroughly rubbed down, and the intimately mixed whole divided into calculated doses. Little difficulty is found in doing this in careful practice, ophthalmic discs, for the use of eye-specialists, weighing but one-fiftieth, and containing one-five-thousandth, of a grain of the active body, figuring in the official pharmacopœia.

Turning from the vegetable to the animal world in search of rare drugs, we have to go to quiet and little-known regions—the high-lying plains of Asia, for instance, where lives a small deer, described as ‘solitary, shy, and nocturnal in its habits.’ With good reason has he, poor little fellow, evolved these habits in his painful struggle for existence; for does he not carry about him a couple of small pouches containing musk, which, at £6 to £7 an ounce, must be a prize to the wily hunter—besides what he can make, in addition, by taking the true article, with the exception of a few grains, out of the pouches, filling them up again with dried blood (very much resembling the original contents in appearance), and selling them as genuine? The old-fashioned use of musk as a remedy for epilepsy has—as much perhaps from the discovery of stronger and more reliable ones as from a question of cost—pretty well died out; but as a scent it is well worth its high price in the persistence of its sweet smell. Did not some ancient Egyptian masons thousands of years back—and, emphatically, before the day of the jerry builder—mix musk with their mortar; and has not the scent lingered, a perennial incense, over their work to this day? Has it not also been said that a little musk, kept in a vase with a perforated lid, will scent a room for years, and when weighed at the end, show no appreciable loss?

A fact this, by the way, offered by scientists to prove the extreme divisibility of matter, for the at most very small amount lost must ever have been floating as particles in the air, knocking up against nerve-endings in the nose, to have produced the sense of smell. And *particles* of musk must, further, be huge lumps by comparison with the size of the constituent *atoms* of the bodies that chemically go to make it up.

Leaving land, and taking to sea, in our search,

it may be our extreme good fortune, particularly in the seas washing Madagascar, Surinam, and Java, to come across a floating, sweet-smelling, grayish mass of ambergris, worth at present £5, 10s. per ounce, or £88 a pound, in the market. Such a find need not either, like the other, in which an innocent and inoffensive animal is killed for having about it a possession it cannot help, psychologically distress the finder; for ‘ambergris’ is held to be a ‘diseased biliary product’ of the whale, of which, as such, it doubtless considered itself to be well rid.

Another peculiar animal product in use as a drug is a solution of the pure venom of the rattlesnake, given occasionally in malignant scarlet fever; whilst less strong, if perhaps hardly less repulsive, is powdered cockroach, which, in six-grain doses, has been prescribed—with good effects, it is said—for dropsy.

But let the reader take heart of grace, they must be in extremely limited use, and it is not likely that he will ever be called upon to personally swallow them; although the lining of a pig’s stomach, scraped and dried, he must not object to, if his doctor prescribe it as pepsine, for indigestion.

With respect to this body, some short time back, a logical observer, whilst giving full credit to the pig as a powerful digester, argued that, the ostrich being apparently a more powerful one still, pepsine prepared from its stomach must be proportionately stronger; and that, if capable of digesting, at its best, the brass taps, buttons, sardine-tins, knives and forks, dish-clouts, and so on that an ostrich is said to eat with apparent relish, even in a reduced form it would be strong enough to easily digest anything in reason in the human stomach. The experiment was carefully tried, and the digestive values of the two pepsines put to the test, with the result that the ostrich ‘wasn’t in it.’

A HANDFUL OF PERILS.



OUNGER sons are given to grumbling at their lot. I was an Irish younger son and a gentleman-farmer, and I considered it one of my luxuries to have a good grumble to myself whenever I liked.

I was one evening thoroughly enjoying a pipe over my fire and the afore-mentioned amusement, and was just murmuring to myself, ‘Peace and quiet at least till to-morrow morning,’ when I heard a whistle at the window, and started to my feet. I knew that whistle well enough; it was old Mike’s ‘lookout’ call. He was my uncle’s keeper, and I had known that signal from my boyhood.

But why should he come and whistle under my window? We were not out ferreting; and for the first moment I felt inclined to tell him to go and knock at the door like a Christian; but in those

days a man was easily put upon his guard, and so I silently raised the window-sash and looked out into the night.

‘Your honour will be taking a turn round the haystacks,’ whispered a voice; and I knew, more than heard, that some one moved away from the window.

Happily you English people cannot understand the state of things which used to exist here; for no one who has not experienced it can really understand it. I dare say what I am saying to you sounds like the absurd mysteries of a stage conspiracy, but to me it was terrible earnest.

Taking a revolver in one hand, I sauntered out, pipe in mouth; and after a pause and gaze at the river, planned to disarm suspicion in case of watching eyes, I strolled on to the haystacks.

It was all but pitch-dark; there was barely

enough starlight for me to make out a figure, which by its voice I recognised as Mike.

'Ah, your honour! it's at the peril of my life I've come to bid you ride the hour that is to Finnsmore, and stop Sir Patrick from going to the fair to-morrow, or never will he come home a mortal man! Never speak a word of how you got warning, and indeed I trust you for that; but, maybe, if the young mistress had not been so good to my Mary, who is gone to the angels, I might have looked far for the courage to be here this night.'

'I have not seen any one here,' I replied. 'I have heard a whisper; that is all.'

There was a slight rustle of leaves, then silence. The dear old fellow was gone.

I stood about a bit in the yard, and then went in again, loitering in the doorway, so that old Bridget, my housekeeper, might not think anything had flurried me.

As I sauntered along, however, I thought over the position and made my plans.

The affair was anything but pleasant. Sir Patrick O'Hara was my brother-in-law, married not six months to my only sister, Theresa. Like so many Irish gentlemen, Patrick had a model farm, and, as is so often the custom with the resident landlords, would be going early the next morning to the neighbouring cattle and butter fair. Mike evidently meant that there was to be an attempt on his life as he drove there in the twilight of the early morning.

I thought my brother-in-law would be starting not later than five o'clock—it was now only nine in the evening; so, though I had twenty-five miles of mountain road to traverse, there seemed to be plenty of time to do it in.

The nearest way was by a ferry; but on Mike's account that was out of the question, as it entailed knocking up the ferryman and making a commotion. I settled that, though it was a bad road, I must go over the mountain.

'Bridget,' I called, 'I am going off to stay with a friend. Don't expect me till you see me.'

Bridget was accustomed to my going and coming with little or no notice, so, though I did not generally start at nine at night, I did not expect her to show much astonishment. As it was she merely said, 'Yes, your honour,' with an audible aside to herself, 'Glory be to goodness! now I'll get the washing done in peace.'

I packed a small bag and saddled 'Tommie,' a big, strong pony, who, I thought, would be more fitted for the expedition than my mare.

I led Tommie quietly down a grass byway to avoid clattering past a row of cottages. I did not wish to attract attention to my movements. Once on the road, I mounted and trotted along; for some way I had to go along the valley, then to turn up to the mountain through a glen to the right.

This glen was not exactly the ride I should have chosen for a dark night; the road was made along a rocky bank, and on one side there was a sheer

descent of some thirty feet into a chasm, at the bottom of which a mountain stream hurried down to the river in the valley.

Naturally I let the pony take his time over this bit of road, and we did not get on very fast, as it was a stiff pull; but at last we had nearly come to the end of it, and I was looking forward to a trot over the mountain turf, when suddenly Tommie gave a violent shy, his hind-legs went over the edge, and for a moment we swayed on the brink, while I felt his hoofs scratching for foothold among the rocks; then he got a point of leverage, and, with a desperate lunge, swung himself up again on to the road, where he stood shaking from head to foot.

'A near thing that, my good Thomas,' I observed as I dismounted in order to find out what it was that had made him shy. To my astonishment, I found in front of me a large black coffin!—not a pleasing sort of package to be thus 'left till called for' upon the open road. Not a creature was to be seen near it; but as I could see but a few yards through the darkness, that was not saying much. Like the Chinese admiral, I reflected, 'This is no place for me,' and after a tussle with Tommie, managed to get him past the coffin, and led him up the road as fast as ever I could.

Once on the open mountain turf, I mounted, promising myself a fast trot; but, to my disgust, I found the pony had twisted his foot in our small adventure, and, vexed as I was, there was no help for it—we had to proceed at a walk.

The night had cleared during the last half-hour, and the moon was rising—that was one comfort. I have been through open dangers many a time, so I trust I'm no coward; but I allow that black, stray coffins on dark nights are not to my taste, and I felt a bit of a shiver as I thought of it, and remembered, moreover, that I had to pass the ruined chapel on the mountain, whose graveyard was said to be 'as full of ghosts as the river of fish.'

I will not say I altogether disbelieve in ghosts, as generally known; and it flashed into my mind that I was likely to come in for ghosts of a more substantial kind, and with some excitement I remembered the whispered reports of moonlight funerals which were heard from time to time.

I must explain that when a man was injured in some lawless outrage, the first thought of his companions was to get him carried away to some secluded spot, since the fact of finding a wounded man might very likely give a clue to the police which would help them to identify the rest of the party.

If the wounded man recovered, good and well; if he died, a public funeral was out of the question, but a midnight funeral in one of the many graveyards round ruined churches was possible. An obliging priest would come for a consideration from some distant place, and a company of well-armed friends assembled at dead of night to lay their comrade to rest in holy ground.

So strongly was I possessed with the idea that there was going to be a funeral that I dismounted when about a quarter of a mile from the chapel, and fastened Tommie, with a long halter I often took with me, to a thorn-tree. Then I walked forward to spy out the land. The road here lay through a glen or dip in the mountain, on either side the ground rose in a steep, rocky slope, and only on the highest point of the little pass did the track widen out, leaving room for the ruined chapel and burial-ground. Keeping to the side of the road and walking as noiselessly as possible, I advanced slowly, and as I drew near the chapel I heard the murmur of voices.

Fortunately for me, the people were too much taken up with the work on hand to look very curiously around them, and I managed to reach the churchyard-wall unnoticed. Creeping along almost on hands and knees, I got to a place where the stones had fallen away, and from whence—with but slight fear of discovery—I could watch what was going on. In the corner farthest from me four men were digging a grave, and soon a little company of people came up the road from the other side of the mountain, carrying a shrouded corpse upon a plank. Placing the plank on the ground, the bearers started hurriedly onward, doubtless to fetch the coffin which I had seen upon the road.

'How about Tommie?' I asked myself, and could only hope that in the moonlight he would pass as a stray mountain pony. But no such luck! Back came the men with the coffin, and Tommie, led by his halter! The men leading the pony called to those at the grave, who produced a dark-lantern, and were about to unstrap my bag from the saddle, when the women raised the Irish wail as they placed the body in the coffin. This was too much for Tommie's nerves; the men, who did not know his little ways, were holding him carelessly. The injured foot seemed forgotten; he reared and kicked desperately for a minute, then I heard him careering at full gallop onward down the road. There was a chorus of smothered oaths, and then the funeral was proceeded with. The sound of a monotonous Latin prayer showed me that some patriotic priest was present, and when the earth was being shovelled in, a low mournful wail again rose from the women.

Directly the grave was filled in the people dispersed; but I had a shrewd suspicion that some of them would remain in hiding upon the road to see if Tommie's rider would appear, and as I slowly crept onward, keeping as much as possible in shadow, I had an unpleasant expectation that at any minute I might have a bullet whistling by me.

After walking for about a mile, I took out my watch and with some difficulty made out the time. It was one o'clock. I had been longer at the graveyard than I had thought. Things were looking serious. I had a good fifteen miles to do yet. No horse, and only four hours to do it in. I might be

delayed again. Casting aside my precaution, I started at a brisk run. Crack! went a gun to my right. The scoundrels were stalking me; but I paid no attention to the shot, beyond, if possible, quickening my pace. After running for some two or three miles, I was forced to pull up for breath. My riding-coat was not exactly a suitable get-up for this sort of thing. Hurriedly I tore off coat and waistcoat and stuffed them into a ditch, and then started on again as fast as I could go. I went on and on without stopping, until the ground seemed to jump up to hit my feet as I pounded on. My head grew dizzy, but I was kept up by the thought that I was going a good pace and was secure of arriving in time.

Suddenly, a voice shouted, 'Halt there!' and I found myself rather roughly collared by a policeman.

Another one, standing a few yards off, held (delightful sight) that rascal Tommie!

'Give an account of yourself,' said my captor.

Easier said than done when one has been running at the top of one's speed for miles. At last, however, I gasped out angrily:

'Hands off! I'm Mr William O'Neil.'

The policeman laughed. 'A likely story; and, pray, where's your honour's waistcoat? Come, talk sense, or hold your tongue. We have found a riderless horse, and it may be a serious business.'

'Don't I tell you, man, I'm Mr William O'Neil! That is my horse.'

'Stop that rubbish; you are a lunatic at any rate, and I arrest you.'

Before I knew what was up I was handcuffed and hauled on to a light cart. I was speechless with rage and exhaustion combined; but, seeing the cart was going my way, I lay back silently, still panting for breath.

The police in Ireland are often moved, to prevent them from being tempted into too intimate friendship with their neighbours. These men were evidently from the north, and it would be difficult to make them realise the situation.

'Take me to Sir Patrick O'Hara's,' I said at last.

'Take you to Sir Patrick's at this time of night! I'll be hanged if I do! You'll go to the Police Barracks; and if you behave yourself you'll be comfortable; and if you don't, you won't.'

I was to go to the Police Barracks, was I? That meant turning off my proper road at the end of another half-mile. I felt desperate. The second policeman was riding Tommie by the side of the cart. Now Tommie, meek as he appeared, had his temper, as I very well knew. On the floor of the cart were one or two little packages. With a sudden inspiration, I turned over one of these with my foot, and after watching for the right moment, kicked it straight at Tommie. Tommie lashed out like a good one, and touched the horse in the cart. Then we had a dance, and the cart landed in the ditch.

When those two policemen were again masters of the situation the lunatic had disappeared into the night.

I was, in fact, tearing across the fields to the O'Haras' house. Souse! splash! Great Scot! if I, an Irishman born, did not go and fall into a bog! Deep in I was, up to my waist, and only saved from worse by my handcuffed hands, which clung to the last firm tuft of rushes. Here was a pretty piece of work! I knew my best chance was not to struggle but to stay still and shout. I feared I was not near enough to the house to be heard there, but there might be a cabin closer at hand.

In intervals of shouting and silence the time passed on. No answer came to my cries. I don't think, honestly, that I dwelt much on my own plight, though it was decidedly dangerous. I was picturing Theresa, fussing over Patrick's early breakfast, and merrily giving that good-bye kiss, which, though she did not know it, might so well be the last.

The birds were just beginning to twitter for the dawn, when far away I heard the sound of wheels and a horse's hoofs. Nearer and nearer it came. It must be Patrick in his dog-cart, going to the fair. As he drew nearer I heard him whistling 'Father O'Flynn' as merrily as a schoolboy. Poor, happy-hearted fellow! Could I but make him hear before he got to the turn down the valley I might save him yet. But I was numb with the cold and wet, and my voice was hoarse and faint.

Still, I shouted, 'Patrick, Patrick.' Though at first he did not seem to hear me, at last, when I had almost given up hope, the horse stopped. I shouted again, and he shouted back.

'You are a respectable sort of a brother-in-law,' observed Patrick as at length, after considerable

difficulty, he dragged me on to safe ground. 'What in the world have you been up to? Handcuffed, and without your coat, and all over bog. I will take you back to your sister, and see what she says to you, young man.'

Now I was safe I kept laughing in a foolish, weak way. 'I was running to warn you of an attempt to shoot you, and the police arrested me as a suspicious character,' I said with difficulty.

'Small blame to them, considering your present appearance,' said Patrick, as he tenderly helped me to walk to his trap. Soon we were bowling back to the house; and I, secure that Theresa would not allow her husband out of her sight till we heard more, enjoyed a hot tub and a good breakfast, and then retired to bed very thankful for the rest, as I was aching from head to foot.

I had great difficulty in persuading Patrick to believe my story; he was firmly impressed with the idea it was a hoax. But after I had had some hours' sleep I woke, and found him sitting by my side.

'Your friends the police have been round,' he said. 'I laughed when I heard their story. Bravo, Tommie! He is eating his head off now in my stable. Looking for you, they chanced on other night-birds who "were wanted;" they were behind a hedge with a gun. Well, we know what that meant, old man. They did not catch them till half-past five; and if I had not been employed elsewhere, there might have been a death in the family.'

So saying, he clapped me on the shoulder and went downstairs whistling 'Father O'Flynn' as merrily as ever.

BLACK-AND-WHITE IN NATURE.

By T. C. HEPWORTH.



FROM the gorgeously-striped rainbow to the humble floweret, Dame Nature shows what a wonderful colourist she is. Whether we glance at the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdom, we can obtain evidence of her prodigality of pigments, and pigments of so wonderful a quality that they defy reproduction by means of the artist's palette. The artist, indeed, is obliged to resort to contrast and other cunning devices in order to represent some of Nature's effects; and then, as he himself will reluctantly admit, he falls very far short of the ideal at which he aims.

The lovely tints which adorn the sky at morn and eve confer by reflection some of their beauty on the land below, which, clothed in its spring or summer dress of brilliant green and divers-hued flowers, already has a coat of many colours. The animal world—and more particularly the birds of tropical climes—seem to embrace in their brilliantly-coloured plumage all the tints of the rainbow.

Even in the mineral kingdom the gorgeous colours of the various metallic ores and other stones defy all attempts to imitate them, and the climax is reached when we come to deal with those minerals which are called precious stones.

Now and again, however, Nature takes a sober fit, and shuts up her colour-box, just as an artist will, by way of change, leave his palette and go to black-and-white. The brilliant hues of summer fade to the reds and russets of autumn, to be succeeded by the white-and-black of winter. But it is in the animal world that curious freaks occur—certain animals, which under ordinary circumstances are coloured, become white. As a rule, white is rather a rarity in the animal kingdom, but appears in some species as a protection. Thus seabirds, whose lives are passed so much in the neighbourhood of foaming waters, are usually partially or entirely white; and in snowy lands certain creatures will assume a white covering so soon as the winter approaches. In Norway, for example, is found the variable or mountain hare, the willow-grouse, the

ptarmigan, the stoat or ermine, the arctic fox, &c.—all these are provided with both a summer and winter costume, the former coloured and the latter white. Then there are animals up north which are permanently white, such as the polar bear, the snowy owl, and the Greenland falcon.

Quite apart from these well-established arrangements of Nature, we have many examples of that curious condition known among naturalists as albinism, or the production of an occasional white specimen of an animal which is normally either coloured or black. Colour in animals is due to pigment found in the skin, hair, feathers, &c.; in albinos the pigment is absent, and as a consequence the hair, feathers, &c. are dead white—the eyes being pink for the reason that they are colourless and the blood shows palely through the tissues. It is astonishing what pranks Nature plays with her creatures in this way. A white blackbird seems to be an anachronism, but it is by no means uncommon. A white blackcap and a white jackdaw would seem to be equally out of place; but specimens of all these can be seen any day at the British Museum, where a case of these natural freaks is exhibited. Albinism is seldom perpetuated among wild animals, possibly for the reason that, in the absence of protective pigments, the eyes of such creatures must be extremely sensitive to light. In domesticated animals the condition is more common, and every one knows how white rats and white mice are common objects of barter among school-boys. True albinos are also found among ferrets and rabbits. It is clear that albinism, except in snowy districts, must be a disadvantageous possession to its owner, making it conspicuous to the creature upon which it preys as well as to its enemies. Among other examples of albinism shown in the exhibits already referred to may be found a hare, a rabbit, a guinea-pig, and other small mammals; a white frog; and, what seems to be more remarkable still, a white crayfish and a white lobster. Among the birds we notice a white skylark and a white robin; while there are numerous examples of partial albinism—birds flecked with white, as if some 'prentice hand had tried to whitewash them and had only partially succeeded in his work. Albinos with white hair and pink eyes are uncommon but not unknown in the human family, and most of us have occasionally seen persons who exhibit this peculiarity.

We have seen, then, that this condition known as albinism is due to absence of pigment in certain individuals, and that examples in the animal world are not uncommon. But it is not generally known that there is an opposite condition to albinism, in which an excess of dark-coloured pigment will turn an individual black, or partially black. This state is known as melanism (from the Greek *melas*, black); and although not so frequent as albinism, specimens are exhibited in our National Museum. An animal may give birth to a litter of cubs; and while most are of the normal colour,

perhaps one or two are quite black, and will remain so throughout life. Here, for example, is a leopard which seems to answer the old question with regard to change of spots in the affirmative, for it looks as if it had been dipped in ink. The spots are there, but they are coal-black, on a somewhat lighter ground. As in the case of albinism, melanism is more common among domesticated animals; and this is very probably due to selective breeding, and the desire of the owners of such animals to establish a strain which shall be pure black; this has certainly been the case with cattle, horses, rabbits, fowls, &c. It also seems certain that domestic animals may show signs of melanism if improperly fed; the bullfinch, for example, is said to assume much darker plumage if given too much hempseed.

Among other examples of melanism which are exhibited at the British Museum are specimens of the wild rabbit, the common rat, and the water-vole. There is also a black squirrel, which, however, seems, for some untraced reason, to be confined to Northern Borneo. Among the birds we find a skylark, a woodcock, a snipe, and a yellow-hammer, all in the deepest mourning. The pigment of which the albinos have been deprived has been distributed among creatures already well endowed. It seems as if Nature had parodied the way in which riches are dealt out to the human family—some having none, and others more than they know what to do with.

TO THE BLACKBIRD.

WHAT strains mellifluous, O sweet-voiced thief,
Are thrilling, flute-like, from thy beak of gold,
While palpitates the air with joy untold!
Thy jocund lay wakes hope and mocks at grief,
And seems to say, 'Be happy while you may,
Taste the delights that fill the passing day;
Watch not the skies for sign of coming storm,
Nor shudder still at yesterday's alarm!'
Or—dost thou merely whistle to thy mate,
With iteration sweet, of plum or peach
That, ripe and ruddy, for thy coming wait?
Does thy melodious carolling but teach
Thy nestlings to pursue fresh depredation
With all the ecstasy of stolen pleasure,
To plunge their bills with nice discrimination
Deep in the hearts of my best fruity treasure?

At noon and eve I watched thee fluttering nigh,
The dewy dawn beheld thee sweeping by,
Like some stray satellite of vanished night,
On plunder bent, yet pausing in thy flight
To sing beside my window, cunning bird!
That through the hush of sleep thou mightst be heard,
And, as Æolian harps by winds are stirred,
My heart-strings might respond with answering chords
And echo thy glad strains in happy dreams:—
I seemed to hear the rush of gurgling streams,
And, sweeter far, the music of fond words;
Above me swung the wild rose, pink and fair,
The breath of woodbine filled the summer air;
I clasped kind hands, dear eyes looked into mine,
Such was the magic of that voice of thine!
So—feathered sybarite! Of what thou wilt—partake,
I must forgive thee for thy song's sweet sake.

M. L. ADDEY.